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S E R M O N
O N T H E
Rise, Progress, Corruption, and De-
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O F T H E
Christian Religion, &c.

[Price One Shilling.]

COMMUNICATIONS

S E R M O N

ON THE

Life, Progress, Corruption, and Decline of

Christianity

OF THE

Christian Religion, &c.

By the Rev. J. H. Stoddard, D.D.

From the Original

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A
S E R M O N

ON THE

RISE, PROGRESS, CORRUPTION,
and DECLENSION

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION,

And the Means of its

Restoration and Advancement.

Preached at

M A N C H E S T E R,

TO AN

Assembly of DISSENTING MINISTERS, and
Others, on *May 12, 1752.*

By Samuel Bourn.

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MARK iv. 30.

And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the Kingdom of God? Or with what Comparison shall we compare it? It is like a Grain of Mustard-seed, which, when it is sown in the Earth, is less than all the Seeds which be in the Earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and cometh greater than all Herbs, and shooteth out great Branches, so that the Fowls of the Air may lodge under the Shadow of it.

WHEN our blessed Saviour entered upon his Office, and, pursuant to the Commission he had received from God, began to execute his great Design, of erecting a *spiritual Kingdom*, a mighty Empire of true Religion in the World, he elected a Number of Disciples, or Associates, who were to be his Instruments and Agents in the Accomplishment of that End. They were Men, who had one principal Qualification, *viz.* Honest and good Hearts, but were destitute of every other Requisite to carry on such a Design. They were rude, illiterate, entirely ignorant of the Nature and End of our Saviour's Undertaking, and the Business they were to be employed in, and, which disqualified them much more,

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had many opposite Errors and Prejudices fixed deeply in their Minds. Our Saviour, having previously raised in them a great Admiration of, and Affection to himself, and Expectation of the Event, by the surprising Power of his Miracles, and the Charms of his Goodness, proceeds in a gradual manner to *unfold to them the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven*. Their Preconceptions of the Messiah, and the End of his Coming, were the same with those of the whole Jewish Nation; that he would be a sovereign Prince, and set up a vast Empire in the World; and they imagined, and fully expected, that this Empire would be of a visible and political Nature, like other Kingdoms on Earth, supported by secular Power and temporal Rewards. For this Reason, and because the Gospel so far resembles earthly Kingdoms, as it is a Constitution of Laws, Precepts, and Instructions, bound upon Men by the Sanctions of Rewards and Punishments, and derived from the Authority of a supreme *Lawgiver*; our Lord, when he speaks of the Nature, Propagation and Effects of the Gospel, generally describes it with the Character and Title of *A Kingdom*, and, in Contradistinction to all other, styles it, with great Propriety, the *Kingdom of God, or of Heaven*. And in order to remove, in the most gentle and effectual manner, the Prejudices of his Disciples, to engage their Attention, open their Understandings, and qualify them for their future Office, he represents to them in various Similitudes, and familiar Allusions, taken from natural and obvious Things, the Rise, Increase, Extent, Effects, Design, and End of this Kingdom: Like as the skilful Architect draws Plans of his intended Edifice, shewing the Situation, Dimensions, Proportions, Design and Use, which serve for Instructions to his principal Agents and Overseers of the Work. The Parables of our Saviour are most of them *prophetical*, not only describing and painting as it were in sensible Images, Things moral, spiritual, and invisible, but

predicting

predicting also the future Operation and Effects of his Gospel in the World.

As the Husbandman forecasts in his Mind the Harvest to be expected from the Nature of the Seed, and of the Soil in which it is sown; or as the wise Statesman foresees the Effects of a political Institution, according to the Genius, Principles, Customs and Manners of the People; so with a more than human Prescience, our Lord foretels the Event of his Undertaking, and the Success of his Religion. Particularly, the Similitude in the *Text* was intended to describe and foretel, the Increase and Progress of our holy Religion, from a small Beginning, to its utmost Extent and Greatness. And the Propriety of the Comparison, and Truth of the Prediction, have been already proved from the Event; and we hope and trust, that they will be yet more illustriously verified in future Ages. The Kingdom of our Redeemer has spread already over a considerable Part of the World, and among the most populous, civilized and learned Nations: And, though the *Jews*, his *antient Heritage*, have *rejected* him, and *would not that he should reign over them*, the prophetic Expression of the *Psalmist* is fulfilled, that *the Heathen should become his Inheritance*, and *the uttermost Parts of the Earth his Possession*. His Religion soon spread beyond the narrow Precinct of the *Jewish Territory*, and the *Mosaic Institution*: It hath extended itself from Sea to Sea, and *from the rising of the Sun, unto the going down thereof*. To this Greatness and Amplitude did the Kingdom of Heaven arise, from the smallest Origin. The *Founder* of this extensive Empire was, in Appearance, one of the *meanest* of the Sons of Men, who, till the Commencement of his Ministry, scarcely distinguished himself from the rest of Mankind, even of the lowest Rank: And after he entered upon his great Office, continued to bear the external Marks of Poverty and Meanness; and in the short Space of four Years, was

was apprehended, condemned, and put to an ignominious Death, as a publick Malefactor. His Disciples also, by whose Instrumentality he was to accomplish his Design, and build up his intended Empire, were Persons of the like Rank, and of themselves utterly incapable of so great an Enterprize. His Doctrine was not calculated to conciliate Men by their *worldly Interests*, nor his Discourses, or manner of Address, adapted to engage the *Passions* of Men in his Favour. Yet this mean and obscure Person, by Instruments equally mean, in so short a Space of Time, and in Opposition to the Passions, Prejudices, and worldly Interests of Men, laid the Foundation of a spiritual Kingdom, which afterwards grew and prevailed, and which we believe, shall at last spread into an universal Empire. These Circumstances of the Commencement of our holy Religion, the low State, and ignominious Sufferings of our Saviour and his Apostles, and the Singularity of their Doctrine and Institution, made their Success, in the natural Course of Things, very improbable; and in fact, they were at first, a great Impediment to its Rise, and raised a violent and lasting Opposition to it. *Many*, say the Evangelists, *were offended at him*, at the Poverty of his Appearance, the Place of his Birth, and of his Residence, and the Nature of his Discourses. They said, *Is he not the Son of a Carpenter?—Can any good Thing come out of Nazareth?—Doth any Prophet arise out of Galilee?—That he spake like a Samaritan,—and one who had a Devil,—* that many of his Discourses were *hard Sayings*, unintelligible, or seemingly absurd, being contrary to their established Opinions. Hence the Gospel became, as the Apostle expresses it, *to the Jews a Stumbling-block, and to the Greeks Foolishness*. But these Circumstances are now to us Matter of Glory, and not of Offence, and afford to every impartial and attentive Person, a strong Evidence of the Divinity of our Religion. Hence *Jesus Christ* appears to us, as the *Power*
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of God, and the *Wisdom of God*; and his Gospel, not a Scheme of human Policy, or a *cunningly-devised Fable*, not the Offspring of Chance, or the Product of wild Fancy and enthusiastick Invention; but a *Revelation from Heaven*, the Truth and the Grace of God appearing to Mankind.

So the Apostle *John*, after mentioning the Incarnation of our Saviour, and his humble Appearance in the Flesh, adds, *And we beheld his Glory*, i. e. we who conversed with him, and were Witnesses of his Miracles, notwithstanding this mean Disguise, *beheld his Glory, the Glory as of the only-begotten Son of God, full of Grace and Truth*. With the like View, the Apostle *Paul*, considering the obscure Origin of the Gospel, and its spreading chiefly among the lower Part of Mankind, not among Philosophers, Statesmen, and Rulers of this World, and the contemptible Persons who were employed in the Propagation of it, says, in an eloquent Strain of Triumph; *Where is the wise Man? Where is the Scribe? Where is the Disputer of this World? Hath not God made foolish the Wisdom of this World? For after that the World, by their Wisdom, knew not God, it pleased God, in his Wisdom, by the Foolishness of preaching the Gospel, to save them that believe*. And he proceeds in a bold Figure, *For the Foolishness of God is wiser than the Wisdom of Men, and the Weakness of God is stronger than the Strength of Men; and God hath chosen the foolish Things of the World to confound the Wise, and weak Things of the World to confound the Mighty; and base Things of the World, and Things which are despised hath God chosen; yea and Things which are not, to bring to nought Things which are*. The Apostle here exults in a prophetick View of the Progress of the Gospel, and its future Rise, upon the Demolition and Ruins of the whole Structure of the Pagan, as well as Jewish Religion; and in the apparent Contemptibleness of the Means and Agents, which the Wisdom of God had chosen to accomplish that End.

Nor is this divine Procedure to be thought dissimilar to all the other Operations of the Power and Providence of God, in the material World, or in the Course of human Affairs. Do we not often see great and wonderful Effects proceeding from Causes, either unknown, or that appear little, obscure, and inadequate? Is not the general Process of Nature of this Kind? Are not the ordinary and continual Operations in it, carried on by Instruments and Materials that seem, to every vulgar Eye, slight and trivial? Do not the Plants of the Earth (according to our Saviour's own Comparison) which grow to a great Magnitude and Height, and put forth large Branches, spring from small Seeds, some hardly perceptible to human Sense? And do we not derive from the common Dirt of the Earth, and from the most vile and loathsome Materials, all that admirable Variety and Profusion of Beauty, which we behold on the Face of Things; whatsoever is pleasing to the Eye, the Smell, and the Taste, and the whole Support of human Life? And in the Affairs of Mankind, have not the greatest Events often depended on very minute ones; the most wonderful Revolutions been wrought by mean Agents; and the most expensive and beneficial Effects, flowed from Causes seemingly despicable and improbable? The Elevation of *David* from the State of a Shepherd to fill the Throne of *Israel*, to make that Nation victorious over their Enemies, and to establish the Law and Worship of God in it. — The Rise of the Patriarch *Joseph* from the Condition of a Slave and Prisoner, to be Chief over the Kingdom of *Egypt*, and the great Revolutions that followed in Consequence of his being sold by his Brethren, — may be recited as Instances of this Kind; beside many other, both from sacred and profane History: And, to refer to a well-known modern History, who that beheld a Person in a mean Habit, labouring in the daily Employment of a *Carpenter*, would at first View have imagined, that this was a
Step

Step towards the Accomplishment of one of the greatest and most beneficial Designs that have been conceived by human Wisdom and Policy, which that Person, so mean in Appearance, was then meditating, and in Effect executing? Further, in all the Transactions and Designs of Men, is it not justly considered, as the Perfection of human Wisdom and Sagacity, to operate in the simplest manner, and bring to pass great Affairs by little Means; to draw from distant obscure Causes, Effects of manifest and extensive Utility; and to rise from the lowest Beginning to the sublimest End? And as the Wisdom of God, or to use the Language of the Apostle, as the *Foolishness of God* excels the *Wisdom of Men*, and the *Weakness of God* surpasseth the *Power of Men*, so much more excellent and wonderful are his Operations. And as in the material Universe, he produceth all the various and astonishing Effects in Nature, from Laws and Causes obscure and sublimely simple; so in the moral World, he executeth Designs of immense Extent, the Purposes of his unerring Counsel and perfect Goodness, by mysterious Ways and Means, by Causes and Instruments that may seem little and contemptible; or which may be indiscernible to our narrow Sight, till, by seeing the great and manifest Effects, we are led to trace out the several Steps, and explore the hidden and remote Causes.

When our blessed *Saviour* was cut off in the midst of his Days, in so short a Time after his publick Appearance in the World, and with such Circumstances of Ignominy and Misery; when his Disciples all forsook him and fled, and lay hid in Corners, and said one to another in Despair, *We trusted it was he who should redeem Israel*, but our Hopes are now at an End, (his Crucifixion confounding all their Conceptions and Expectations of him;) then the Seed of the Gospel seemed to die and perish, and our Lord's Design was in all human Probability rendered abortive.

tive. Yet immediately afterward it took Root in the Earth, and sprung up with a surprising celerity of Growth. The Gospel made a rapid Progress into different Parts of the World, and the vast Success of it in that Age, was not owing to the persuasive Words of Eloquence, or the Devices of human Art and Wit, but to the miraculous Demonstration of the Spirit and Power of God, which accompanied it. At the end of the apostolick Age, when the miraculous Gifts and Influences of the Holy Spirit were withdrawn, and the Kingdom of Heaven was left to stand by its own internal Strength, without those auxiliary Forces from above, which before supported it, and when the secular Powers of the world were bent upon its Destruction; then again, according to human Conjecture and Foresight, it must have declined and sunk to nothing. Nevertheless, it still increased, and diffused itself in so gradual and imperceptible a manner, as to demonstrate the Truth and Propriety of another prophetick Comparison of our Saviour preceding the Text. — *So is the Kingdom of God, as if a Man should cast Seed into the Ground, and should sleep and rise Night and Day, and the Seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.* Thus by indiscernible Steps and Degrees it increased, till, in the Time of the Emperor Constantine, it was spread into all Parts of the known World; and in the Compass of a few Reigns afterwards, became the publick Religion universally professed through the Roman Empire, Paganism as well as Judaism sinking and vanishing before it.

But from that Period the Kingdom of Heaven, instead of increasing and flourishing still more in the World, on the contrary (and contrary at first View to probable Expectation, since it had then those secular Advantages on its Side, which were before employed against it) declined, both in Extent, and in its Power and Influence upon the Minds of Men; and was a third Time reduced to the most imminent

imminent Danger of being intirely subverted and abolished, and a strange counterfeit Religion, and most detestable Form of Tyranny substituted in its Room.

To what Causes this Declension of Christianity was owing, and what are the proper Means of its Restoration and future Advancement, let us proceed to consider.

And, in the first Place, to what *Causes* the Declension of our Holy Religion, the Abridgment of its Extent, and Decay of its Power over the Minds of Men, have been principally owing — This deplorable Change must, in general, be attributed, not to any foreign Force or external Violence, but to an internal Corruption. The celestial Plant of the Gospel had endured the Storms of Adversity and Persecution; and, though they threatened its utter Extirpation, it notwithstanding took deeper Root, and sprung up: But after these Tempests were overblown, it became subject to another Danger, equally or more to be dreaded, an inward Distemper and Decay. The Kingdom of Heaven subsisted and flourished by its own innate Vigour, and the perfect Soundness and Goodness of its original Constitution, for some Centuries, notwithstanding all outward Hostility and Opposition. — But what all its open and declared Enemies, what the terrible Persecutions of the Roman Emperors, what the Inroads and Devastations of the barbarous Nations, when the Roman Empire was over-run by them, did not effect, was almost accomplished by other Means, and another kind of Enemies. In this respect, it resembled the Civil States and Kingdoms of the World, which generally suffer more, and are exposed to greater Danger, from intestine Corruption and Discord, than from foreign Invasions. A Train of internal Disorders introduced and propagated, not by open, but secret and domestick Enemies, have been more pernicious and dangerous to this spiritual Empire, than any external Opposition. Wide Breaches have been made upon
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its Constitution ; — Its fundamental Laws have been dispensed with, and almost annulled ; — its Institutions perverted, and its Principles changed ; — intestine Factions and Discords have been set on Foot and fomented ; — the appointed Ministers and publick Defenders of it, have become themselves disaffected, and Betrayers of its Laws and Privileges. — It hath been converted into an Engine of temporal Power and sacerdotal Dominion. Hence, instead of a State of the greatest Freedom and Virtue, it degenerated into a State of the most abject Slavery, and abandoned Wickedness. It was changed from a spiritual and divine Government, into the worst kind of worldly Tyrannies, under the worst of Men. An astonishing scene to review ! and such as might tempt us, as it has in fact tempted many, to call in question the Divinity of the Gospel ; was not this universal Corruption, and prodigious Tyranny, predicted in the Writings of the New Testament, and even described in Terms so clear and expressive, that a more just and comprehensive Description cannot be given of it, even since the Event. Our Saviour sowed good Seed in his Field, but in the Night, in the Times of Darkness and Ignorance, Tares † were sown likewise in Abundance, according to his prophetick Parable ; and our Enemy did it, not professed Enemies, but secret, who took Advantage of the Darkness of the Times to conceal their pernicious Designs. Some Seeds

† This Parable is not here applied in its proper Meaning ; for by Tares our Saviour meant false Professors of Christianity. It would have been happy for the World, if those who have claimed a Power in the Church to punish and extirpate Hereticks and others, and in exercising it, have horribly persecuted and destroyed vast Numbers of the best Christians, had paid more Regard to the important Instruction of this Parable, which is a direct Prohibition of all such Proceedings. *They came and said unto him, Lord, shall we go and gather up the Tares ? He replied, Not so, lest ye root out the Wheat with them : Let both grow together until the Harvest. Matt. xiii. 24.*

of Antichristianism were very early sown ; but during the Inclemencies of those early Seasons, they hardly appeared ; till the Sun-shine of Prosperity brought them up, and they grew and multiplied exceedingly, and *choaked* the *good Seed* which had been sown in the Earth. And the Scheme of Antichrist, the Scheme of grafting upon the genuine Stock of the Gospel, a spurious System of Religion, adapted to the Avarice and Ambition of its Contrivers and Abettors, and to the Ignorance and Superstition of others, when once begun, was so artfully managed, so steadily and zealously pursued, so powerfully enforced, and extensively propagated, that at length——almost all Conceptions of true Christianity were obliterated in Men's Minds——the Holy Scriptures were become obsolete, were unstudied, unknown, unread——Oral Traditions, the Canons of Councils, and the Decrees of Popes were substituted in their Room——the Authority of Christ was supplanted by the Usurpation of his pretended Vicar——the Worship of God was turned into Ceremony ; slavish Submission to, and zealous support of the growing Hierarchy, and an implacable Hatred against all Opposers, were applauded as most Christian Piety, and comprehensive of all Virtue and Merit. Thus the State of the Christian World degenerated, till it became, in many Respects, worse than the Heathen had been.

But let us reflect more particularly on the several *Sources* of this great Apostacy, and endeavour to trace out the impure Fountains, from which were derived those foul Streams that polluted and empoisoned the pure and salutary Current of our holy Religion.

In the first Place, the *Ministers of the Gospel*, they who ought to have been the publick Guardians of the Purity of our most holy Faith, and Conservators of our Christian Privileges and Liberties, became themselves corrupt, abused their office and station, and were Accessaries, or rather Prin-

Principals, in enslaving the the Christian World, and perverting the Christian Doctrine and Worship. And when the Labourers and Dressers of the Lord's Vineyard became like Locusts and Caterpillars in it, what Fruit could be expected? When, instead of cleansing, weeding, and pruning, they cherished the luxuriant Branches and noxious Weeds, what Produce could there be, even from the genuine Stock of the Vine? In very early Times, a certain spiritual Pride and Ambition began to infect their Minds, which produced Envy, Jealousy, and a mutual Contention *who should be greatest in the kingdom of Heaven*; notwithstanding our Saviour had very expressly and pathetically admonished his Disciples and Ministers against this Vice, foreseeing the Temptations they would be liable to. But their adverse Circumstances, with the Concurrence no doubt of the Gospel-Influence, hindered this Spirit from breaking out in an open and violent manner, during the first Ages. But afterwards, when the Incentives of Avarice were added; when, by the Favour of the *Roman Emperors*, many Stations in the Church were not only regarded as honourable, but were found to be very lucrative Posts, and of secular Influence, it then broke out with wasteful and deplorable Effects. For wicked and worldly-minded Men there always have been, and always will be, in all numerous Bodies, who, if there be any tempting Places of Power and Profit, will scruple no Means to obtain them; and when obtained, will abuse them to the worst Purposes. Hence they considered each other as Rivals for the same Greatness, Authority and Wealth—Hence sprung mutual Enmities, Inquisitions into each others private Vices and Indiscretions; Aspersions, Calumnies, endless Invectives to the common People, or Accusations before Synods, or Solicitations at the Emperor's Court, that by one Means or other, some might be degraded, and themselves, or Persons of their Party and Interest, advanced.

vanced. But the Vices and immoral Actions of each other, were not found to be the only, or the most convenient Ground of mutual Attack. Another, more advantageous, was soon found out. As a Temptation to ecclesiastical Pride, arose from their supposed Knowledge of the one true Religion, their understanding its Mysteries, and their Capacity of teaching the several particular Doctrines of it, from this and other Causes which might be alledged, *Orthodoxy* in all Points began to be insisted on, as essential and of great Merit; and a Difference of Judgment concerning any particular Doctrine to be censured as highly criminal, and sufficient to render Men unworthy of the pastoral Office. Their Vanity and Ambition, their Envy of others, and their eager Desire of a Handle of proceeding against their Opponents, tempted them to compose Creeds of Faith, to enlarge them continually, and to express them in such Terms, as would comprehend exactly, their own particular Notions, and as directly contradict some of their Adversaries; and then, by their Intrigues and Influence of a Party, to get them approved and established by a Council; and finally, to brand their Opponents with the Names of *Hereticks* and Apostates from the Faith, and inspire into the Minds of the People the utmost Horror and Detestation, both of their Opinions and Persons.

Hence proceeded one of the first great Corruptions of our holy Religion, viz. in *Doctrine*. For these insolent and ambitious Men, who set up for *Lords over the Faith* of their Brethren, were certainly not likely to preserve the Purity and Simplicity of the Christian Doctrine, whilst they were continually altering and enlarging their Creeds, and intending every Addition for a Snare to entrap and scandalize their Adversaries; whilst they were labouring to mould the Doctrine of Christ, according to their own dark Imaginations, unchristian Passions, and worldly Interests. And thus the State of Things proceeded from bad

to worse, till the grand Apostate, *the Bishop of Rome*, by the Advantage of his superior Name, Wealth, Situation in the Metropolis, and Vicinity to the Court, found Means, at last, to bring all under Subjection to himself, and establish his own Creed universally. And of what extraordinary and anti-scriptural Articles this Creed consisted, I need not mention, nor shew how well calculated to serve the Views of ecclesiastical Ambition and Tyranny.

The next great and publick Corruption to be observed, was in the *Worship of God*. And how far the Simplicity of the Christian Worship was lost, amidst a Multitude of ceremonial Additions; to what an Excess of Superstition it was carried, and perverted even to the grossest Idolatry, by the Substitution of new Objects of Devotion, a numberless Train of Saints, or inferior Deities of their own Creation, is too well known to require a particular Narration. Instead of an intelligible and rational Service, the Act of the Understanding, and influential to Virtue, they introduced a wild and fanciful Pomp of Appearance, and an unintelligible Service, fitted to amuse and captivate the Eyes and Ears of the Vulgar, but which could neither be accompanied with the Understanding, nor tend to the Reformation and good Conduct of Life.

Let us attend to the principal *Source* from which this Corruption was derived, and the *Manner* in which it was introduced. When the heathen Persecutions ceased, and Christianity was spread, not only among People of a lower Condition, but among many Persons of the highest Rank, and enjoyed the Protection and Countenance of the Roman Emperors, great Numbers of Heathens became Converts in Appearance, and took upon them the Profession of Christianity, but brought with them a strong Propensity to the Modes and Customs of their former Pagan Worship. The Christian Clergy of those Times, zealous of propagating their Religion, and willing to encourage, by all Means,

Means, so many and considerable Proselytes, and ambitious of establishing their own Popularity and Influence, began to relax their former Strictness, and yielded much to the accustomed Notions and Manners of their new and numerous Converts; till, at length, Multitudes of all Ranks coming over to Christianity, they connived at, and countenanced their retaining many superstitious Modes and Customs of Worship, resembling Paganism; and their changing their former Heathen Deities for Christian Saints. So that, in Process of Time, the Christian Worship became, both in the Modes and Objects of it, excepting little more than the Exchange of Names, and Abolition of Sacrifices, a perfect Picture of the Heathen Superstition and Idolatry. Thus they increased the Number of the *Professors*, but not the *Practisers* of Christianity, and enlarged the Extent of our holy Religion, at the Expence of its Purity and Influence.

But we are not to imagine that these great Enormities, in Doctrine and Worship, took place all at once, or in a short Space of Time, or without Opposition. There were many virtuous and truly pious men amongst the Clergy, who disapproved and strenuously opposed, for a long Time, these Innovations. But when many hypocritical and mercenary Men, and others ignorant and superstitious, found Means to obtain Places of the greatest Influence in the Church, and for low and selfish Ends encouraged such Extravagancies; and above all, when *Antichrist*, whose *Coming was after Satan, with lying Wonders, and all the Deceits of Unrighteousness*, exerted his growing Power and Policy, all Opposition was in Time suppressed, these Corruptions increased, and were universally established by all the Methods of Subtlety and Violence: Ignorance, Superstition, and Absurdity in Religion, being found proper to serve the Views of Ambition and Worldliness, and to support

support a religious Tyranny, but the pure Doctrine and Worship of the Gospel very improper.

It may justly be thought Matter of Wonder and Astonishment, that such Corruptions, not only should be introduced, and spread in the Christian World, but continue and increase for so long a Period of Time, and subsist even to this Day in many Nations; so the Author of the *Apocalypse*, when he prophetically contemplated the *Antichristian Beast*, wondered with great Admiration. This universal Prevalence, and long Continuance of *Antichristianism*, may be ascribed principally to these Causes. In the first Place, the Antichristian System of Falshood and Superstition, was gradually and artfully interwoven with civil Policy, and ingrafted upon the secular Powers, which became of Consequence a firm and lasting Support to it. Had not this intimate Connexion been formed, and the Princes of the World disposed to give their Power and Strength unto the Beast, the Reformation, in all Probability, had had an earlier Date, and Men, unrestrained by Authority, and unawed by Penalties, would have never ceased uttering loud Complaints and Protestations. It was not till the *ecclesiastical* Power began to consume the very Vitals of civil Power, and the papal Tyranny became sensibly oppressive to Princes themselves, and the Sinews of it were strained to the utmost Height, that they broke, and the Reformation sprung up under the Protection of secular Authority. It is owing principally to the same Connexion that Popery still maintains its ground, in many States and Kingdoms.

Another chief Cause of the long Continuance of these Corruptions, is, the Fondness of Mankind, especially the vulgar Part, for Mysteries and Absurdities in Belief, and Extravagancies in Practice. They are apt to despise what is easy and intelligible in Doctrine, and what is plain and unorna-

unornamented in Worship. They love to be amused with Things mysterious and pompous, and often admire most what they least understand.

There is too much Truth in that Maxim of the Romish Church, that *Ignorance is the Nurse of Devotion and Zeal*, that is, of a certain Species of them. And the more absurd any Article of Opinion is, and the more wild and freakish any Species of Devotion, when once Men have attached the Idea of Sacred and Venerable to them, they always become the more obstinately tenacious of them. We have an Instance of this among the Roman Catholics, in the Article of *Transubstantiation*, which, by reason of its palpable Absurdity, is their favourite Doctrine, and made the Test of a true Catholic. It would be a singular Happiness, was there no Doctrine of a similar Nature current among Protestants, and of which they were not equally tenacious.

Principles, Opinions, a Species and Chain of Ideas, Customs, and Modes, descend by hereditary Succession; and those which are false, ridiculous, or hurtful, are not less firmly entailed, than those which are good and true. When we duly attend to this also, and consider it as the natural Course of Things, the inevitable Effect of parental Influence, and the Force of Education and Example, we shall not wonder, that Error and Superstition are of so long Continuance, and the Progress of Truth so slow and difficult.

The first Reformers of Popery were Men of great Abilities and invincible Spirits, and were thoroughly sensible of many Enormities in the Doctrine, Government, and Worship of the Romish Church. But it exceeds all Probability to suppose, that they should purge off, *at once*, all the Dross, and refine their System of Christianity to its utmost Purity and Value. They applied themselves, as might be expected, to take away those Corruptions and

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Irregularities, which were of a later Growth, and the Sources of which were most apparent. They extirpated many of the rankest Weeds, but were deceived in some that were of ancient Standing, mistaking them on that Account for genuine and useful Plants. Some Absurdities, especially in Doctrine, they could not distinctly trace up to their remote and ancient Origin; or if they could, yet were over-awed by a Reverence for Antiquity to confound them with Scripture Doctrines, and propagate them as constituent Articles of our holy Religion. The purifying Christianity from these remaining Dregs to its genuine Clearness and Lustre, is the Work of the *present* Times, and the excellent Design of the wisest and best Men of *this* Age. In the Progress of which Design, it may be naturally expected, that the most ancient Errors and Follies, are the last that will be exploded out of the Christian World.

Nor, in the third Place, did the *moral Part* of our holy Religion escape the Contagion of this general and dreadful Apostacy. When the Purity of our most holy Faith and Worship was lost, Virtue sunk with them, and the moral Practice of Christians became equally corrupt and vicious. To paint a true Likeness of the State of the Christian World, in some past Ages, would look like deforming human Nature, and would seem to reflect Disgrace on Christianity itself. The Character which the *Apostle* describes of the Heathen World, in the first Chapter of his Epistle to the *Romans* *, may be truly applied in almost all

* *Though they had the Knowledge of God, they did not honour and worship him; as God—But were vain in their Imagination, and their foolish Heart was darkened; pretending to be wise in Religion, they became Fools; and changed the Glory of the incorruptible God, into the Likeness of mortal Man — And honoured the Creature instead of the Creator — Therefore God abandoned them to the Lusts of their own Hearts — To debase themselves — They burned with unnatural Lusts — They were replete with all Injustice, Impurity,*

all its Parts, I would not say to the Christian, but to the Antichristian and papal World. Immorality was no longer the Object of publick Odium, or ecclesiastick Censure. — Heresy and Schism, *i. e.* any Opposition to the Incroachments of Tyranny and Superstition were alone branded with Ignominy, and prosecuted with unrelenting Severity. — The only Virtues in Vogue, and universally extolled, were Monkery, Celibacy, Pilgrimages, Penances, Donations to the Clergy, and Persecution of Hereticks. — The moral Precepts of the Gospel were of no Reputation, — the Force of them upon the Consciences of Men was suspended, and almost abolished, and an Indulgence given to all Wickedness; — Christianity, which was designed to promote the Peace of Society, and the Good of Mankind, was converted into an Engine of Extortion and Oppression, and a Pretence for Bloodshed and Murder. — If there be any essential Precept of the Gospel, it is the great Law of Equity, and of mutual Forgiveness and Amity among Christians; but this Law, more than all others, was, in innumerable and tragical Instances broke and trampled on; — secular Power was employed, and penal Laws enacted in direct Opposition to it, — and infinite Subtlety and Zeal were made use of, both from the Pulpit and Press, to annul its Obligation, to sanctify Persecution, and make Malice and Cruelty appear religious and meritorious; and all this under Colour of promoting the true Faith, and of establishing Order and Uniformity. So fatally was the Prediction of our Saviour accomplished, *Think not that I come to send Peace on Earth, I come not to send Peace, but a Sword.*

Impurity, Villainy, Covetousness, Meanness; were full of Envy, Murder, Contention, Deceit, Malice; were Whisperers, Backbiters, profane, insolent, proud, arrogant, Inventors of Mischief, undutiful to Parents, void of Ingenuity, Sincerity, Natural Affection, Fidelity, Mercy. Rom. i.

It will not be difficult to assign the Causes of this Depravity in the Morals of Christians, with respect to every Virtue, especially that of Charity. In general, it was the Effect of that spiritual Tyranny, which grew and universally prevailed in the Christian World, whose Policy, like all despotick and bad Governments, was to encourage Vice, Luxury, Insolence, and Oppression in the Great, both Clergy and Laity; to keep the Poor in extreme Ignorance, Idleness, and Dependence, and to support its own Power by treacherous Art, extreme Rigour, and the Terror of barbarous Punishments. Particularly, it was owing to the Avarice of the Clergy, who invented and multiplied gainful kinds of Indulgence to Sin, — to their profligate Example, — their mutual Contentions, — their industriously enflaming the Minds of Christians against each other, — and their artfully involving the civil Powers in their Party-Quarrels and ambitious Schemes: And finally, to the great Encouragement which was given to those worst of Principles, and which the Vulgar are too ready to embrace, *viz.* that Faith, or Devotion, or Zeal, will cover a Multitude of Sins, and make large Compensation for a immoral Life.

We have now briefly observed the *principal and general Corruptions* of our holy Religion, and the *Causes of their Rise, Increase, and Continuance*; by all which we see how the Kingdom of Heaven, instead of being an Empire of divine Light and Truth over the Understandings of Men, and of moral Precepts and Motives over their Actions; instead of being a State of Virtue, Freedom, Peace and Happiness, hath been converted into an Empire of Darkness, Error, and Superstition, a religious Tyranny, and a Scene of Disorder, Contention, Persecution, and all manner of Vice. — And upon a Review of the whole, Can it be thought unaccountable, that the Gospel hath declined and lost Ground, or hath had so little good Effect in the World?

World? Or that Mahomedism, which cut off the grossest Absurdities that had then been ingrafted upon Christianity, should spread to a wide Extent, and even encroach on the Boundaries of our Lord's Kingdom? Need we wonder that the Jews should persist in their Infidelity? Or that an unconquerable Prejudice should remain in all the Infidel Nations, against the Reception of the Christian Institution, so changed and deformed?

The Church of *Rome* hath indeed laboured abundantly to extend and propagate her spurious System of Christianity throughout the World; hath employed vast Numbers of Missionaries, or Mock-Apostles, and appointed large Funds for that Purpose, — but hitherto with not much Success, — their boasted Multitudes of Converts being for the most Part either fictitious, or merely nominal: And it is no Breach of Christian Piety to wish they may never have more Success; nor any Presumption to predict they never will. Assuredly Christianity will not spread far, whilst connected with a Scheme of Principles, Practices, and Views, so absurd and iniquitous, and contrary to the Nature and Design of it. It cannot be thought, that the Providence of God will make use of such Instruments to convert the unbelieving Nations, and the Kingdom of God be extended throughout the World by such wretched mercenary Aids, such real Traitors to its Sovereign, and Enemies of its true Constitution.

What a speedy and wonderful Progress did the *Kingdom of Heaven* make, from the smallest Beginning, till it overspread the Roman Empire! And it rose, not only unassisted, but opposed by the Powers of this World, both Temporal and Spiritual, — as the *Apostle* describes it in his Epistle to the *Ephesians*, *We wrestle not only with Flesh and Blood, not only with the Prejudices and Lusts of human Nature, but with Powers and Authorities, with the Rulers of the Darkness of this World, with spiritual Wickednesses in*
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Heavenly Things, i. e. both with the secular and ecclesiastical Powers of Judaism and Heathenism. But the *Kingdom of Antichrist*, though the Propagation of it hath been attempted by employing immense military Forces, as in the holy War, and by all the Negotiations and Artifices of human Policy, and by innumerable Missions, supported by vast Funds, yet hath not been able to extend its Power over any one Infidel Nation. So different was the Success of the true Christian Religion, carrying rational Conviction along with it, and tending solely to the Benefit of Mankind; and of the counterfeit papal Religion operating by Fraud and Force, and intended only to enslave the World.

Let us now proceed to the remaining Branch of our Subject, which is the principal End of this Discourse, and which must be acknowledged by all Christians to be of the greatest Importance; *viz. the Means* by which the *Kingdom of Heaven* may be restored to its former, and raised to a greater Power and Extent in the World.

Now from the Account which hath been given of the Rise and Progress of Christianity in the first Ages, and the Causes of its following Abridgment and Declension, we may draw the surest Directions for discovering the Means of its Restoration and future Advancement. For Speculations, how rational and probable soever, are best confirmed by Facts, by the Experience of the present, and the History of former Ages, from whence the most solid and useful Knowledge is to be derived. Now, as many strong Arguments of Reason might be alledged, so the Experience of Ages, the whole History of the Christian Church, from the Beginning to this Time, serves more fully to evince, that a Removal of all internal Corruptions intermixed with our holy Religion, and preserving it free from human Alterations and Additions, are necessary Means, both of restoring its Influence, and enlarging its Extent. Presumptuous and ill-designing Men have been
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continually adding to Christianity, multiplying Articles of Faith, and Ceremonies of Worship, under Colour of defending the Faith, and increasing Devotion; and many pious and well-designing Men have given a zealous Support to such Innovations, imagining them to be necessary Barriers to Infidelity, or strong Pillars to support Christianity, or decent and admirable Ornaments to heighten its Beauty; which have been in Reality a Weakness and Incumbrance to the spiritual Building, and quite foreign to that majestick Simplicity, in which it was first built. *The Foundation of Jesus Christ, saith the Apostle, standeth sure, having this Seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His;* there is therefore no Occasion for human Tests to try the Soundness of Christians, nor have they any Authority to judge one another. — *And let him that nameth the Name of Christ depart from Iniquity;* the End of the Gospel is a virtuous and good Life; and whosoever lives in Obedience to Christ, will be accepted as his Disciple. But on this plain Foundation, what a Superstructure hath been built by the Ignorance and Superstition of Men! not only, to use the Language of the same Apostle, *Gold, Silver, precious Stones,* good and durable Materials, but *Wood, Hay, and Stubble;* a Heap of vile Materials, which have been infinitely disgraceful and detrimental to the Edifice. But, he adds, *Let every Man take Care how he buildeth, — for his Work shall be tried by Fire; — and if it remain unconsumed, he shall be rewarded; — but if not, though he may be saved, yet not without Danger and Loss, like one, whose House is on Fire, and who escapes from amidst the Flames.* And as the Temple of our holy Religion hath been incumbered with innumerable Additions of human Fabrick, and loaded with so many vain Ornaments and Ensigns of Man's Device and Sculpture, the Aggregate of many Ages, it hath been, and remains to be, a Work of great Labour and long Time, to take off all these superfluous

and hurtful Appendages, and remove away so vast a Heap of Rubbish. When this is done, it will manifestly appear to be of divine Architecture; all Men will behold it with Admiration, and all Nations assemble to worship in it.

It is the Desire and Prayer of every good Christian, that the Gospel may be propagated, and all Infidel Nations converted to Christianity: But the first and fundamental Step, in order to the Progress of our Religion abroad, is to begin with the Reformation of it at Home; with restoring its first Purity, and regaining its proper Influence on the Actions of those that already profess it. Whilst the Christian Faith is perplexed with strange and unintelligible Articles, and the Christian Worship is adulterated with superstitious Inventions, and disguised with an antick Dress, and pompous Retinue of Modes and Ceremonies; while Christians contend for these as essential, or of great Importance, are divided into Parties and Sects, and abuse and condemn each other on Account of their mutual Differences concerning these; while each Party retains a Spirit of Bitterness and Obstinacy, and none will yield a Title, or alter a Mode, in order to Reconciliation and Union; while the Lives of Christians are generally immoral, and the Precepts of the Gospel have little visible Effect, and those Precepts of Charity and mutual Forgiveness, which are most important in themselves, oftenest repeated, peculiarly enforced, and an Observance of which is pointed to as the distinguishing Mark of a Christian, have the least Effect; while such is the State of the Christian World, and the Principles and Temper of Christians; while these Corruptions and Deformities appear in the blackest Colours to the Eyes of Infidels, is it possible that Christianity should flourish and spread? Or, that any Attempts to propagate the Gospel should produce extensive and valuable Effects? Can that State be in a flourishing Condition, whose original Constitution is impaired, and its fundamental

tal Laws dispensed with, and made ineffectual? Is that Kingdom likely to grow in Power and Extent, which labours with intestine Feuds and Factions, and the Outrages of mutual Oppression? *Every Kingdom*, saith our Saviour, *that is divided against itself is brought to Desolation*, — the Strength even of the *Devil's Kingdom* is founded on Union, — *For if Satan be divided against Satan, how shall his Kingdom stand?* And can it be expected or hoped, that the *Kingdom of God* should subsist and prevail in the World, whilst involved in domestick Troubles, and the Broils of opposite contending Parties, beside all other Corruptions? There is indeed no Enemy so dangerous to this spiritual Empire, nothing so contrary to the Genius and Design of the Gospel, nothing so obstructive to its Influence and Progress, as Discord and Enmity among Christians? And whence sprung this great Evil in the Christian World? Does Nature inspire Men with an Antipathy and Hatred against all who do not believe and worship in the same Mode with themselves? — No more than against those who have not the same Countenance or Dress. — Does Christianity then recommend or justify it? — Nothing is more contrary to the Letter and Spirit of the Gospel. — Let us then briefly trace out the several Steps of Discord and Persecution in the Christian Church. From varying and multiplying Articles of Faith, and Modes, and Objects of Worship, there naturally followed a great Disagreement in religious Opinions, and devout Practices; — from magnifying their Importance, tenaciously adhering to them, and endeavouring to impose them on others, this Disagreement was heightened into Contentions, Defamations, Enmities, and Injuries; — from the Pride and Avarice of the Clergy, sprung a Desire in them to enflame these mutual Prejudices and Discords, and make use of them to serve their own worldly Views; — and by obtaining a Share of secular Power, by entwisting their corrupt:

rupt System of Faith and Worship with the Civil Government, and the Administration of Justice in many Countries, they derived from this Alliance Strength and Support, and were enabled and tempted to proceed in establishing a religious Party, joined to a secular Interest, by all manner of Oppression. And as Villains pretend to much Honesty, and Hypocrites talk much of Religion, and the most ambitious and ill-designing Men in Civil Government raise the loudest Clamours of Patriotism, and pretend the greatest Services to their Prince and Country; so the worst Corrupters of our holy Religion, have all along professed the warmest Zeal for it, declared themselves to be the sole true commissioned Guardians and Defenders of it, assumed the Title of *Orthodox*, and stigmatized all Opposition and Difference with the Name of *Heresy* or *Schism*. And as one Extreme begets another, and one Abuse provokes to another; so Invectives, Anathema's, Impositions, and Persecutions from one Party, naturally produced Recriminations, Resistance, Bitterness, and Obstinacy in the other; and whenever the Tables were turned, and the oppressed Party got the Power, Revenge, Re-imposition, and Re-oppression. All the aforementioned Evils and Corruptions in the Christian Church, and especially that mutual Strife and Hatred, which is the greatest, and the Effect of all the other, are to be removed by taking away the remote and original, as well as more immediate Causes of them, *viz. by a Reduction of our holy Religion to its first State and Principles*. Particularly — by reducing our System of Faith from a Number of complex mysterious Articles, to a few plain Facts, incontestably recorded, and a few equally plain and intelligible Doctrines, undeniably resulting from those Facts*; — by forming and preserving our Christian

* St. Paul, in his Speech to the *Athenians*, has given us an excellent Summary of the fundamental Articles of our Faith, and the great Principles

Christian Worship, in a Model most agreeable to the spiritual Nature and moral Design of our holy Religion; — by taking off that Weight which Men have placed on Opinions and Modes, not essential to Christian Truth or Worship, of little or no Moment to the Interest of Society, and Amendment of Mankind; — by abolishing all such Doctrines, Practices, and Distinctions, as tend, in their own Nature, to weaken Mens Regard to the moral and social Virtues; — by carefully separating, in our Views and Actions, the Interest of Religion from our own worldly Interest, or that of any Party or Body of Men; — by the Ministers of the Gospel always thinking and acting like Men who are appointed to support and propagate a *spiritual Empire, a Kingdom which is not of this World*. It is a Maxim in Government, that no State can flourish, or be long supported, without having frequent Recourse to the Principles on which it was first founded, and renovating the Constitution according to them. This Observation is not more applicable to any *Civil State*, than to that *Spiritual Kingdom* which our Saviour set up in the World; which must be reduced to its original Constitution, and

ciples in which the Ignorant and Unbelieving are to be instructed, as the Basis both of natural Religion, and the Christian Revelation. — *That there is one God, Maker and Lord of all Things, — that he is not a local Being, nor delighted with external Worship, — that he is the Giver of all Things, and is in Need of nothing, — that Mankind are all his Offspring, — that they depend upon him, and live in him, — that in Compassion to the Ignorance of Men, he hath revealed the Gospel to them, — that his Design was to bring Men to Repentance, — that he hath appointed a Time of universal Judgment, — That all Men should be judged with perfect Equity, — that he hath appointed the Man Christ Jesus to be Judge of Mankind, — that the Resurrection of Christ from the Dead, is the Evidence of his divine Commission and Authority being given to him.*

It would have been much for the Honour and Interest of Christianity, if this apostolick Pattern had been better imitated by later Preachers and Propagators of the Gospel.

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reformed upon the same Principles on which it was founded, before it will regain its proper Power over Mens Minds and Lives, or a solid Foundation be laid, on which it may rise to the highest Greatness and Prosperity. And this is confirmed by the Prophecies of the New Testament in the fullest Manner ; for they plainly declare, that a general Apostacy and great Corruption would ensue at the Coming of *Antichrist*, — that this would obstruct the Advancement of Christianity, — and that Anti-christianism must be destroyed, and a general Reformation accomplished, before the Jews will be converted, or *the Fulness of the Gentiles come in*; that then the Church of Christ will flourish, and the Gospel spread throughout the World. When the Clouds of Error and Superstition, and the Storms of Contention and Persecution, which have been raised by the Sorceries and Magick of Antichrist, are overblown, the *Son of Righteousness* will shine with a powerful Influence, and the *Plant of the Gospel* spread and *bring forth much Fruit*. When the Christian World shall become a Scene of Virtue, Knowledge, religious Freedom, and fraternal Amity, and the Gospel is evidently seen to have great beneficial Effects on human Society, and the moral Conduct of its Professors ; then will Christianity recommend itself to all Men, support itself without the superfluous Aid of learned and elaborate Apologies, will appear excellent and divine in the Eyes of Infidels, and the Propagation of it become practicable and easy. Then may we expect the *prophetick Parable of the Text*, and all other Predictions relating to the future Extent and Grandeur of the Kingdom of Heaven, to receive their full Accomplishment ; and according to the Words of our Saviour, that *every Plant which his Heavenly Father hath not planted, will be plucked up* ; all false Religions extirpated, and the true Religion of Christ become universal.

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Now of all the Means that have been suggested, in order to reduce the Christian World to such a happy and glorious State, and promote our holy Religion; if any seem to merit a particular Recommendation, it is this. — That we use *all* lawful and honourable Methods to abate the Prejudice and Antipathy of Christians one against another; and instead of ministering, to take away those Things that have proved Fuel to their Passions, and enkindled mutual Jealousy, Resentment, and Disgust; to avoid Reproaches and Invectives, and all unnecessary or odious Distinctions and Diversities, and to comply, as far as we can with a good Conscience, to the Inclinations, I may add, the Prejudices of our Christian Brethren. In all publick as well as private Dissentions, they discover the most Christian Spirit, and aim best at the Interest of Religion, who take the first Step, that is in itself lawful and innocent, to a Reconciliation.

How far all or any of the afore-mentioned Means of restoring the Purity of Religion, and the universal Peace, Freedom, and Virtue of the Christian World, may be in the Power of any particular Persons or Societies, must be left to their own Conscience and Judgment. Let it be our Care, not to be wanting in the Prosecution of this great End, to the utmost of our Power. How weak soever our Abilities, or narrow our Sphere, or private our Condition; let us contribute our Mite; remembering the Words of our Saviour, *He that is faithful in that which is little, is faithful also in much*. If our Circumstances, as Dissenters from the Ecclesiastick Establishment, the great national Society of our Christian Brethren in this Land, enjoying the Protection, but destitute of the Favour, of the ruling Powers, deprive us of publick Influence, and some Advantages of serving the common Cause of our holy Religion; — this should produce in us a greater Attention to improve those Advantages that still remain with

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us. And some there are notwithstanding very obvious and considerable, some that result from those very Circumstances. For if the State of Religion amongst us, be disengaged from all those secular Interests, political Ties, and Shackles of human Imposition, which bind the Hands of some, and byass the Understandings of others; are we not hereby set free from the greatest Difficulties and Obstructions? Have we not a full Scope for Enquiry, Judgment, and Action? Liberty to search and examine all Things, to alter, rectify, and amend, to fill up what is defective, and cut off whatsoever is superfluous and offensive in our own Manner and Profession of Christianity? What should hinder us from reducing Religion among ourselves to its genuine Purity and Excellency? What should prevent our exhibiting to the World a Specimen of Christianity in its native Form, and most becoming Dress, with that elegant Simplicity and natural Grace, that will strike the Judgment, and win the Affection of all considerate and impartial Men?

As far as this hath been already accomplished, it is our real and greatest Honour, and an Honour that will increase in Proportion as Mankind become more candid and generous, and understand better the authentick Constitution of the Christian Religion. As far as this hath not been effected, it must be our greatest Disgrace. This should be the Object of our continual Attention, our repeated Inquiries, our publick Councils, and social Consultations. To such Disquisitions, our Principles as Protestants, our Profession as Dissenters, our Situation as in a Province of the greatest Freedom, our Opportunities of assembling for mutual Consultation, our Advantages from a fraternal Union and Co-operation, invite, solicit, oblige us. To suppose our present State, previous to such Examination, to be indefective in every Part, and capable of no Improvement, must imply Vanity, Prejudice, and a most

most unbecoming Presumption in our own Favour. It is possible, that the *Protestant Dissenters* in this Nation may retain in their System of Faith, or engraft upon it, some Doctrines, the Offspring of dark Ages, of mystick and visionary Heads, or corrupt and ill-designing Hearts; — they may possibly still retain a Relish for Schemes of Anti-christian Imposition and undue Authority amongst themselves, and something of that Spirit of Intolerance and Persecution, which they discovered in the last Century, and which the Power of the Protector could hardly restrain within Bounds; — their *Ministers* may, sometimes, in employing their honest Endeavours in the Service of Religion, be discouraged and disabled, be deterred from speaking Truth, and exposing some Absurdities in Opinion, and Immoralities in Practice; by real Indigence, by a servile Dependance, by an Awe, not of the civil Magistrate, but of Persons no way respectable; ignorant and worthless, yet insolent and assuming. — It is possible, that in throwing off with Disgust and Abhorrence, the *gorgeous meretricious Attire*, with which the Church of Rome had prostituted the Christian Worship, they may have inclined a little to the opposite Extreme, and left it too bare, or in too coarse Habilliments, and given it a disagreeable Aspect in the Eye of the World. For a certain, Order, Solemnity, Propriety, and Elegance, though not essential to Christian Worship, yet are so far from being inconsistent with it, that they are requisite to give it a proper Grace, and attractive Appearance, to cure the Indifference of some, and overcome the Prejudice of others. May not something of this kind be wanting amongst us, to recommend our Manner of Worship, give it a more pleasing Form, and make it correspond better to the current Ideas of Mankind, and their natural Sense of Propriety and Decorum in divine Service? Though our Religion may be refined to a great Purity, and we may retain the precious

Metal, with little or no Intermixture of Dross, yet may it not want a certain Polish to make it shine in the World? especially in an Age more polite and critical than any since Christianity commenced? Without all doubt the Lustre of good Works, of beneficent Actions, and an unblameable and exemplary Conduct, will be the best Ornament and Recommendation of our Religion; and it should always be our principal Solicitude, to make *our Light so shine before Men, that they seeing our good Works, may glorify our Father who is in Heaven.* This ought to be done in the *first* Place, and above all Things; but other Things ought not to be left undone. Other Circumstances merit our *secondary* Care, and justly claim a particular Attention. And in regulating these, our View should not be confined wholly to the Purity and Influence of Christianity among ourselves, or those of our own Denomination; but should be more extensive, and comprehend the general Effects and remoter Consequences, which the proper Conduct and agreeable Form of the external Part of our Religion may have on all our Christian Brethren around us, on the general State of Christianity, the Advancement of Reformation, the Removal of Offences, and the Conciliation of Peace and fraternal Amity, throughout the universal Church, or Kingdom of Christ. This should be the great ultimate View, the supreme governing Motive of all our Intentions and Actions.

Let us then consider ourselves, not only as Members of civil Society, and Subjects of a temporal Kingdom, and bound by civil Laws and all Obligations of Humanity, to serve the Interests of that State or Community to which we belong, to be faithful to *its* Laws, Constitution, and Sovereign; but as Subjects of a higher Government, a celestial Empire, and Members of a more extensive religious Community, and bound by the highest Obligations, by eternal Sanctions, to reverence and preserve inviolably

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its sacred Laws, and divine Constitution, and bear a true Allegiance to its invisible Head and Sovereign. The strongest Arguments that can operate on human Nature, conspire in exciting our utmost Endeavours to promote the Peace, Power, and Enlargement of *this Kingdom of Heaven*. Here centers every generous Sentiment, worthy Design and pious Motive, that can affect the Heart, or guide the Actions of a reasonable Man and sincere Christian. No one who professeth himself a Christian, can think himself unconcerned to rescue Christianity from Corruption and Violation, to restore and extend its Influence. Let every one act according to his Station, as a good Member of the Christian Church, as a faithful Subject of the Kingdom of Heaven. *All Members have not the same Office, yet we being many are one Body in Christ, and every one Members one of another.* Let each discharge his Office according to the Nature of it, and the Obligations of a Christian. *He that ministereth, let him wait on his Ministering; he that teacheth, on Teaching; he that exhorteth, on Exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with Simplicity; he that ruleth, with Diligence; he that sheweth Mercy, with Chearfulness.* Above all, let every one order his own Conversation as becometh the Gospel of Christ; for there is nothing so vain and absurd, as to pretend a Zeal for Religion, and the publick Interest of Christianity, and, at the same Time, to disgrace and disserve it by a scandalous Example. Nor let that impious and Anti-christian Imagination ever enter into our Minds, that we can defend and advance the Christian Cause by any Methods of Fraud, Violence, Contention, or Uncharitableness; but let us apply all those Means, and those alone, which *the Wisdom of the Serpent*, joined to *the Innocency of the Dove*, may suggest.

Nor let us take Alarm at little or imaginary Dangers to the Christian Religion, while we are not perhaps sufficiently

ciently aware of those that are real and great. The only formidable Danger to our holy Religion, must arise from an internal Corruption, not an external Opposition. It is that which gives all the Ground of Advantage, and furnishes all the Weapons to the open Adversaries of Christianity. If some Men of rash Tempers, and superficial Understandings, who have never taken Pains to distinguish the Dross from the Gold, and to understand the true Nature of our Religion, have taken Occasion, from the manifest Corruption of it, to reflect on Christianity, or to depreciate the Institution of the Christian Ministry and Worship, this Consequence ought not to give us Disturbance, but rather the Cause, from which this Evil of Infidelity, and many greater, have proceeded. Christianity, its Worship and Ministry, can never sink, or fall into Contempt, if not abused and corrupted. Their own intrinsic Excellency and Importance are a sufficient Security. All groundless Censures, and contemptuous Expressions, whether ludicrous or serious, will be found experimentally to have little Weight or Effect, and are sufficiently refuted and best answered, by being easily overlooked, and silently despised. We may safely trust to the Light of Reason, the common Sense of Mankind, and the natural Force of Truth; or if not to these, to the Providence of God, and the Predictions of the New Testament; that Infidelity shall never prevail against Christianity; and that *the Kingdom of Heaven*, when restored to its proper Soundness and Vigour, and established on its own Foundation, will support itself, increase in Power and Magnitude, and finally triumph over all Infidelity and false Religion.

Here then fix your Attention; this Way bend all your Zeal, and employ all your Assiduity, — to heal the Disorders of the Christian Church, and restore our holy Religion

Religion to its pristine Health, and natural Strength. It will then flourish and extend its salutary Influence; Enmity and Opposition will cease; Knowledge be increased, and the everlasting Gospel successfully preached, and propagated among all Nations, till *all the Kingdoms of the World* are united in the *universal Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Which God of his infinite Mercy Grant —

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Religion to its political, and national character. It will have a powerful influence in the future of the country. It will have a powerful influence in the future of the country. It will have a powerful influence in the future of the country.

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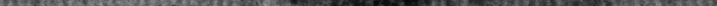
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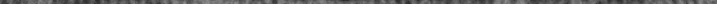
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